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Agnes Wilmott's history, and the lessons it taught

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Pennell



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AGNES WILMOTT'S HISTORY,

AND

The Lessons it Taught.

BY

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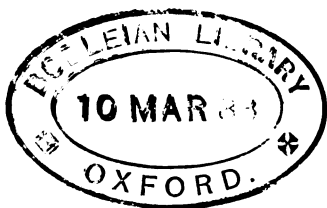
'BERTRAM ELDON,' 'NELLIE GORDON,' ETC.



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AGNES WILMOTT'S HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEARY TRAVELLER.

'Hear, sweet Mother, hear the weary,
Borne upon life's troubled sea ;
Gentle guiding Star of Ocean,
Lead thy children home to thee.
Still watch o'er us, dearest Mother,
From thy beauteous throne above ;
Guard us from all harm and danger
'Neath thy sheltering wings of love.'

T was a cold, dreary winter's night.
The wind howled through the
stillness of the lonely hours of
darkness. There was no sign of life
around, no friendly pitying moon to
cheer the traveller on his way, no gleam
of light discernible through the gloom.

Along a rough and rugged road walked a young woman about three-and-twenty years of age, hand-in-hand with a little boy. She did not seem to heed the solitude, or fear the dangers which might assail her, should she be met by any evil-disposed person. Her one aim and object appeared to be to get on with all possible speed; every now and then a few words of prayer escaped her lips as she repeated the 'Memorare,' beseeching the Blessed Virgin to protect herself and fatherless child, and help them in this their hour of need.

Agnes Wilmott was both weak and weary, and evidently very poor. Her black dress was rusty, and much mended; the hand of Time had nipped the edges of her thin plaid shawl, leaving only a fragment of fringe here and there, which looked more like rags than trimming. Her old straw bonnet was somewhat bent and battered, with long and constant wear; but it was put on with care, and the sad, sweet face which it surrounded, told, in some measure, of the

suffering life of its owner—evidently this poor woman was no ordinary tramp.

Agnes Wilmott and her child were on their way to London, and very tired and foot-sore they were with their day's journeying. The little boy's toes peeped through his old worn boots, and the pain caused by exposure to the excessive cold made him every now and then limp, as he did his best to keep up with his mother. Her mind was so occupied with present troubles and anxiety as to the future, that for some time she did not notice his endeavours, in spite of the pain he was suffering, to keep pace with her.

At last a cry from the child, whose foot had come in contact with a sharp stone, caused her to stop, and looking down she noticed his pitiful limping.

'My poor Johnnie!' she said, 'your little feet are very tired! I wish I had the strength to carry you. We will sit for a while under the shelter of this high hedge, and rest, and then we shall be better able to go on.'

'Where to, mother?' he asked.

‘Where to? God only knows,’ she replied, as she looked down at the anxious upturned face of the weary child.

‘May God and the Blessed Virgin help us!’ ejaculated Agnes as, reaching the place she had decided on, she drew the shivering boy closer to her side, and endeavoured to protect him from the inclemency of the weather, by covering him with part of her almost thread-bare shawl.

Johnnie sat clasping his knees for a time, looking disconsolately at his swollen hands.

Agnes Wilmott, in her eagerness to reach the end of her journey, had pressed on too quickly and beyond the little lad’s strength; and when she saw he could scarce keep from crying, she blamed herself for having walked so long a distance.

‘Be brave and patient, my dear,’ she said, ‘and then perhaps it will not be long before we shall find some place where we can put up for the night.’

But even as she tried to comfort the

child, her heart sank within her, knowing as she did how entirely destitute she was—without a home or earthly friends.

But although, poor creature, she was frail, and ill able to bear the hardships to which she was exposed, she did not allow herself to give way, as many would have done under similar circumstances, to despondency. She had learnt one of the secrets of Christian resignation, the most perfect of all—‘the love of God.’ She trusted in Him, knowing that He who is infinitely good had sent her her trials and sorrows, in His love.

Poor Agnes! in whom else *could* she trust? It was God who had made her desolate; but in mercy, not in judgment, had He tried her, that she might trust Him all the more.

For some time the mother and child sat crouched together; and whilst she tried her best to shield Johnnie from the sweeping wind, her thoughts reverted to the past, until she became so absorbed in her sad reflections as to forget the cold snow which lay around her,

whilst the little boy, with his head nestled in his mother's lap, slept, forgetful of all his childish troubles.

At length she roused herself, knowing what harm the child might suffer from being kept out on such a night.

On looking round, Agnes fancied she could discern a faint glimmer of light in the distance. This was a great relief to her, for *now*, perhaps, she might get some assistance. Awakening the boy, she told him of the discovery she had made. At first it was difficult to make the poor little fellow understand that he must again walk on in the snow and wind; for Agnes was determined to make an effort to reach the place whence the light proceeded.

'Oh, mother!' exclaimed Johnnie (as after another ten minutes' weary toil they saw a small cottage), 'here we are, quite close to a house. I *do* hope the people who live in it are kind, and will give us some food; perhaps they will be sorry to see us out in all the snow, and will let us stay with them until to-morrow. I am

so hungry, and tired, I don't think I can go on any farther !'

It was not without some hesitation that Agnes knocked at the cottage door, and tremblingly waited for an answer ; but either the inmates were not at home, or perhaps the raging wind prevented their hearing the rap.

Again and again she knocked, and was just on the point of leaving, sick at heart, and sorely perplexed as to what she should do, when, most unexpectedly and to her great relief, the door was opened.

The person who answered the summons was a short stout woman, with a clean bright face, and a pair of large, dark eyes that beamed with kindness and good-nature. Her net cap was closely quilled all round, and tied down with a blue ribbon ; her dark stuff gown, relieved by a white handkerchief (and it *was* white) about her neck, gave her a respectable and comfortable appearance. Mrs. Martin (for such was her name) looked somewhat surprised when she saw the young woman and her child

standing before her ; their miserable and dejected countenances made her hesitate in shutting the door against them, as she often was obliged to do to the many tramps who not unfrequently passed by that way, and made a point of begging at the different cottages for assistance.

‘What is it, my good woman ?’ she inquired kindly. ‘It’s a bad night for such as you to be walking the roads. Maybe you’ve lost your way; and if *that* is the case, I can no doubt set you right.’

It did not take Agnes many minutes to explain her trouble : how she and her child had been walking since the morning, and how unable they both felt to proceed any farther on their way that day. She then begged to be permitted to have shelter for the night, if it were only in some shed or outhouse.

‘You do indeed appear to be in sad distress,’ said Mrs. Martin. ‘Come inside and rest awhile, and then, perhaps, we shall be able to think of something which may help you in your trouble.’


Very thankfully was the offer accepted

by Agnes, who was indeed grateful as she found herself and Johnnie safely out of reach of the piercing wind and drifting snow-storm.

CHAPTER II.

‘A FRIEND IN NEED.’

‘He will not despise the prayers of the fatherless, nor the widow when she poureth out her complaint.’—ECCL. x. 2.

N old-fashioned three-roomed little cottage was the home of Widow Martin. The roof was thatched, and the rooms were rather damp, not at all what would be considered a ‘Model Cottage’ in these days. But it looked so snug and cosy, with its wood fire, over which the tea-kettle swung on a hook; its small-paned windows filled with flower-pots; and its walls decorated with pictures. The fire looked very inviting, for both mother and child felt the bitter cold of the night in their thin clothing.

‘Sit down,’ said the widow to Agnes, as she pointed to a large, wooden arm-

chair with a comfortable patchwork cushion on the seat.

Agnes was truly glad for the rest and warmth, and Johnnie sat beside his mother, watching Mrs. Martin, as she busied herself in placing some cups and saucers on the table, and took out of a cupboard a loaf of bread, some butter, and a small jug of milk. The teapot was earthenware, the sugar brown, and the butter salt, but what a treat this was to the poor tired travellers!

When all was ready, the good woman bade Agnes come forward, and make herself at home; 'and *mind*,' she said, 'you make a good meal, while I go and see what I can do to put you up for the night: my place is small, but no doubt I shall be able to make shift somehow or other. Give the little lad plenty to eat; the fare is poor, but such as it is, let him have as much as he wants.'

The colour began to return into Johnnie's pale face, and his eyes brightened, as he sat heartily enjoying his simple meal. The warmth was delight-

ful to the benumbed, ill-clad boy, after the pain of frost had left his fingers and toes ; and his sense of satisfaction was complete when he saw his mother able to enjoy the bread and butter as he did himself.

In a short time Mrs. Martin returned to see how they were getting on.

'I hope you have made a good tea,' she said, her face beaming with kindness. 'Now don't be in any hurry to get up, but keep still and rest a bit, and let the little chap have a good warm ; it's far too rough and cold a night for you to turn out again. I've made you up a bed, so I hope you will accept a night's lodging, which will be warm, if it is humble.'

Agnes thanked the good woman, saying it was more than she ever expected. Her face was flushed now, and her eyes very bright. Widow Martin thought the food and warmth had done the young woman a world of good, and was pleased to have it in her power to help a fellow-creature in trouble. She was a practical Catholic, and, as such, she believed that works of charity done for the love of our

Blessed Lord, who permits us to minister to Him in the person of His poor, are pleasing in His sight. She knew that God loves and receives the least offering made to Him, and that the reward of each will be proportional, not to the amount they gave, but to the love and pure intention with which it was given. Thank God! the Catholic poor are seldom wanting in personal charity. Those who have worked in their midst cannot have failed to witness the generous sacrifices made by those in need for others who were in greater want than themselves. The poor of this world possess in their poverty a rich treasure, in the numberless opportunities they have of being like their Divine Lord, and their life of privations and daily labour, if sanctified, may be the means of obtaining for them great rewards hereafter.

Whilst Mrs. Martin had been occupying herself in getting the little back room ready for her visitors, Agnes sat thinking of the past, contrasting her former happy life with the painful position in which

she was now placed. Two years since she had been a happy wife, with a good and loving husband ; *now* she was a poor widow on her way to London, with but little hope of obtaining work, whereby she might gain her daily bread, and a shelter for herself and child. Yet there was more hope in her heart than her circumstances warranted. It was true she knew much of poverty, decent, respectable poverty, and of the struggles of the poor to get work and bread ; but of the depths of poverty and degradation, in which thousands are irrecoverably sunk in London, and other large towns, she knew next to nothing.

The future appeared terribly dark to the poor girl. This was the first time in her life she had ever left her native village, and little did she know how lost and desolate she would feel alone and unprotected in that great city.

The trials of life are indeed numberless—each has its own special anguish ; but let us remember that trials and sorrows do not come at random, like arrows

shot aimlessly from the hunter's bow. If the hairs of our head are all numbered, how much more our sorrows! Yes! God, we may believe, not only numbers but even chooses the sorrows and trials sent us.

Johnnie had fallen asleep: he was well-nigh exhausted with all he had gone through that day. Naturally he was a bright intelligent boy, and had been his mother's only companion for so long a time, that she had talked to him of her troubles and plans as if he were much older.

Children whose lot it has been to be trained in the school of sorrow have often far quicker sympathies than grown-up people who have had but little experience of the more bitter of life's sufferings.

Mrs. Martin's return to the sitting-room roused Agnes from her reverie. The widow's kind motherly manner soon won the young woman's confidence, and led her to unburden her sad tale.

For a long time they sat by the fire

talking over different plans, which they thought might be the most feasible in enabling Agnes to gain a subsistence.

At first, Mrs. Martin suggested that Agnes should rent a room of a neighbour who lived (as she said) not more than a stone's-throw from her own cottage, promising to do all in her power to help her.

'I think,' remarked the widow, 'that I should find no difficulty in keeping you well supplied with needlework—for I have a deal to do for the gentry round about this place; and if at any time (which is not likely) we should want more, why, there's Mrs. Spriggs, who keeps the large shop down at Hazlemere, about a mile off; she'd give us plenty to keep on with. Ever since my husband died, and that's ten years come next August, she has always employed me.'

To this proposition, however, Agnes would not consent, much as she appreciated the kindness which prompted it.

'You are very good,' she said, 'to take so kindly an interest in me, and were it not that I shrink from remaining so near

Ashington, I would only too thankfully stay here. As it is, I have quite made up my mind to go to London. I fear it will be strange and lonely at first ; but I have a cousin living at Shoreditch, so that I shall have some one to speak to. Unfortunately I am not sure of her address, for it is now five years since she left our village with her husband, who had a promise of work in that part of the city. However, I dare say I shall manage to find her out.'

Seeing how determined Agnes was, Mrs. Martin forbore saying anything more on the subject, but advised her to take the rest she so much needed.


Wishing her kind hostess good-night, Agnes retired to the little room prepared for her. She did not forget to thank God for all His goodness that day, and the Blessed Virgin for having answered her petitions; and not long after she laid herself down, her eyes were closed in sleep.

We will now leave her for a time, whilst I give my readers a sketch of Agnes Wilmott's former life.

CHAPTER III.

A SLIGHT SKETCH OF AGNES WILMOTT'S FORMER LIFE.

‘See that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that their Angels in heaven always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.’—ST. MATT. xviii. 10.

GNES was the child of poor but respectable parents. The Bartons had lived all their lives at Ashington, a pleasant village some twenty miles north of London, sufficiently far not to be reckoned one of its suburbs.

Yet Ashington, if correctly described, was more of a district than a village. It could boast of its handsome houses with grounds almost large enough to be called parks, and farms with low-water meadows.

The principal street, which was more of a lane than a street, with its mingling of small shops and houses standing back from the gaze of passers-by, behind high walls and rows of trees, led to the very pretty little Catholic Church and schools.

Both Barton and his wife laboured in the fields; and as they were good industrious people, it seldom happened that they wanted for work. They had, however, several children to provide for, and Agnes being the eldest, it naturally fell out that there was plenty for her to do at home, and but little time for much learning.

Mrs. Barton, however, although obliged to keep Agnes from the day-school, in order to mind the baby and assist in keeping the cottage clean and tidy in her absence, managed to send her to the evening instructions which the good 'Sisters' gave three times a week.

The convent where the classes were held not being far from where the Bartons lived, it was seldom the little girl missed these opportunities of learning.

Agnes, when but twelve years of age, was a comfort to her mother; and although her acquirements were not great, she was capable of being very useful in many ways, even to the mending of the clothes, etc. But above all, Agnes could

be trusted, and her mother's careful training might be seen in the daily conduct of her child.

Yes ; Mary Barton endeavoured to do her duty by those committed to her care. She remembered that He who said, 'Suffer little children to come to Me,' had promised a special blessing to those who strive to teach them to love Him ; and as a good Catholic and mother, she realised the responsibilities of her charge, knowing the solemn account she would most surely have to give at the last great day ! Well would it be if all Christian mothers would consider the sacredness of their duties ; for how much the future peace and happiness of their children is in their hands !

Many of the neighbours who knew the Bartons, and watched the little girl fulfilling her daily work with the same care and industry when left alone as when her mother was present, would remark, 'that it was no wonder Agnes Barton was so good a child, as she had such excellent parents ; this was indeed

but the world's testimony, yet true, and in those few words were expressed what was really the case, that Agnes was influenced by the example set her, in the lives of her father and mother.

When, after a hard day's work, Mary Barton and her husband returned home in the evening, they were always sure to find a clean hearth and a bright fire with the tea prepared, which they so much needed.

On the whole, Agnes Barton's home was a happy one; and the young girl was well content with her humble lot.

The Bartons by their steadiness and exemplary lives had gained the respect and goodwill of all those by whom they were known, whilst their children were reckoned amongst the most regular and attentive in the school.

Mary Barton, without bringing up the subject of religion continually before them, which might weary them, found ample opportunities of instructing her little ones in the sacred truths of the Catholic Church.

Of an evening, before they went to rest, she would talk to them of Jesus and His blessed Mother, of their guardian Angels who had been watching over them through the day, and how God had given each one of them a bright and beautiful Angel with no other work to do but to care for them, and who never tired of watching them ; that their Angels were full of joy when they were good, and grieved when they were naughty and disobedient. And then she would finish by telling them to ask their Guardian Angel to take care of them through the night, and in this way her children received their earliest lessons, the impressions of which they remembered in their after lives.

In the course of a few years, when the two eldest boys had had a fair share of schooling, and were of an age to do something towards earning their own living, their father decided on their going to a brother of his, who had settled in a large manufacturing town in Yorkshire and was doing well. He had

written, offering to take the two boys and put them to a trade. Work was very slack at Ashington, so Barton resolved on accepting this opportunity of employment for his sons. As to Joseph and Denis, nothing could satisfy them but going to their uncle, and they were delighted when it was finally arranged for them to leave Ashington.

It was not, however, without many regrets that they took leave of their mother and Agnes. Mary Barton did not say much to her two boys—it was a silent leave-taking; her heart was too full to speak, but she looked at them in a sort of way that said a great deal more than words could have done.

Their father hurried them off at the last, fearing they might be late for the train, for they had a long distance to walk before they would reach the nearest station. Very quiet the village of Ashington looked in the early morning. It was long before five, and nothing seemed to be stirring except the cocks, who were enjoying the fresh morning

air, and were crowing at the top of their voices.

Quite hot and tired the boys were when they arrived at the station, just in time to get their tickets and take their seats in the train. Their father, bidding them a hasty farewell, stood on the platform watching them until the train was out of sight.

It was about this time that an event occurred which changed the ordinary course of Agnes Barton's quiet life. Several workmen were sent down to Ashington from London to paint and decorate the squire's house; amongst their number was a young man of the name of Philip Wilmott. Now Agnes was constantly in the habit of going to this house, for Mrs. Costello, the squire's wife, knowing the Bartons were poor, kindly kept her well supplied with needlework. Philip Wilmott had noticed the girl, and was struck with the beauty and modesty of her countenance. He managed to meet and make her acquaintance, and in doing this there was not


much difficulty, for in so small a place as Ashington, those who attended the little Catholic Church were generally known to each other. But after a short time, when Mrs. Barton became aware how much attention Wilmott was paying her daughter, and that indeed the friendship formed between them had ended in their becoming deeply attached to each other, she spoke to her child, reasoning with her on the folly of entertaining the idea of marrying whilst yet so young; but that at the end of two years, if all was well, and Philip Wilmott proved himself to be what they should wish, with regard to character, etc., *then* both she and Agnes's father would give their consent to the marriage.

At first it seemed hard to the young girl, that just as such happiness was within her grasp, she should be prevented from entering upon it; but Agnes had ever yielded obedience to parental authority, and submitted to the judgment of those over her, as a dutiful daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEDDING.

'If roses on my path I meet,
I feel the gift is Thine ;
If thorns spring up to pierce my feet,
I still will not repine.
The blessings sent to win my love,
O Lord, I freely take ;
The trials sent my faith to prove,
I bear for Thy dear sake.'

T length the time came when Philip Wilmott was allowed to claim Agnes for his wife. The Bartons had given their consent to the union, for they had every reason to believe that the young man would make their child a good husband. Barton had made many inquiries respecting his character, and received a most satisfactory account from those who had known Philip Wilmott from a boy.

Early on the morning of the wedding-day, Philip and Agnes received Holy Communion, and after the first Mass, all those who had known Agnes from her childhood assembled in the little Church. Not only were they anxious to be present on account of the interest and affection

they entertained for her, but also that they might join in the prayers of the Church for God's blessing to descend upon the newly married couple.

In this way was Mary and Thomas Barton's eldest child married. Their union was sanctified, and they were strengthened by the graces received to lead a faithful, happy life, such as God would approve of.

A few months after this the Bartons left Ashington, having determined to emigrate with their three youngest children to America. The farmer in whose employment Barton had been for so many years moved away to a distance, and thus the poor man was thrown out of work. It was a sad parting between Agnes and her good parents, for in all probability they would never meet again in this world.

A year of great happiness passed away, and Agnes was the mother of a beautiful boy. God's especial blessing appeared to be with the young couple. Philip Wilmott was fortunate in getting

regular and good work at Ashington, so as to enable him to take a four-roomed little house in the village. With the savings of the last few years, sufficient furniture was bought to make their home comfortable, and thus they began their married life in a respectable, decent way. How much better would it be for many of those who so constantly get, as they foolishly call it, settled in the world without even the prospect of a sufficiency to keep themselves from actual want, if they would only act upon the advice of their superiors, and wait, like the Wilmotts, until they had put by a something to commence life with. Much, very much misery, not only to themselves, but to others, would be saved.

We must pass over some six years, during which time the Wilmotts prospered in their humble way. Work came in for Philip almost more than he could manage to get through, but he did not forget God in his prosperity. He found time to pray, and often to hear Mass. He knew that God had given him time

for the fulfilment of his duties in life, and that if he endeavoured to perform them with the intention of pleasing his Heavenly Father, his time would be employed in the manner best calculated to secure his eternal happiness. All seemed bright and happy with Philip and his wife, when an unexpected sorrow came upon them.

The scarlet fever broke out in the village, and carried away into the church-yard many who had little thought of death a few weeks before. Silently it passed from house to house, into each by turns, laying down in the lap of death, sometimes the strong man, the mainstay of his family, sometimes the frail delicate woman, or the bright blooming child the very idol of its parents. There were empty cradles, where the babies used to lie, no longer needed, for many a poor heart-broken mother had had the anguish of seeing her cherished infant snatched away from her loving care. In some instances where God had called the little child to Himself the sorrowing

parents would weep by the grave of their loved one, but weep *peacefully*; knowing and acknowledging it was *love* that took it, and that although the cross pressed heavily upon them, He knew best what was for the eternal good of their treasure.

Others again gave way to utter hopeless desolation, rebelling against God; breaking out into repinings, and giving way to sullen silent sorrow, adding to their sufferings in this world and the next. Our Blessed Lord when He strikes His servants intends them to feel the blow, and to feel it keenly. He does not forbid them to weep, and for a time we cannot help feeling the anguish of parting with those so dear to us; but we ought as Catholics to believe that when God takes our dear ones to Himself, He does so in love; and then there will be no murmuring or distrust, but we will make a generous offering of our sorrow to Him.

The fever spread very rapidly through the village. In some houses more than

one in a family were summoned before the judgment-seat of Almighty God. Such times are very terrible. We know, indeed, that death must come, but we know not the day or hour. Neither is there any sin in fearing the dread visitant; the only fear is lest we ourselves should not be prepared for it when it comes. God may, and does sometimes, in His infinite mercy to those who have led lives of forgetfulness of their last end, grant them the grace of a death-bed repentance; but let us not reckon on that, for such a grace is seldom given, and we certainly cannot look for so great a mercy if we persistently neglect every necessary preparation.

Philip Wilmott was one of those stricken down with the fever. From the first he thought he should not pull through; but to him the thought of death was without terror, his daily life had been a continual preparation for it. He remembered the warning given to all those who are journeying through life, that we are sojourners on the earth,

and that it is appointed to all men once to die, but that the time is uncertain : the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night, for when they shall say Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIP WILMOTT PASSES AWAY.

‘There remaineth, therefore, a day of rest for the people of God.’—HEB. iv. 9.

‘The life that knows no ending,
The tearless life is there.’

TENDERLY and lovingly was Philip Wilmott nursed by his wife. When the fever left him, his strength gave way ; and so great was the prostration, that it became evident to all those who saw the poor man that his hours were numbered.

Philip was perfectly aware of the danger he was in, and his one great desire was to fit his soul for its last long journey. He spoke often to his wife of

the separation so near, begging her to submit to the trial their Heavenly Father had seen fit to send them ; to remember that death is the beginning of eternal life to those who have served their Lord faithfully.

Philip Wilmott had lived a life of preparation for another world, and now when God would call him, he was ready to obey the summons, committing his loved ones to the care of Him who has promised to comfort the fatherless and widow in their distress ; and, fortified with the Holy Sacraments of the Church, he peacefully passed away to the life that knows no ending. Yes, the soldier of Christ, after many a conflict, had accomplished his earthly destiny, to take his place with the people of God for whom rest is prepared.

Johnnie at this time was only five years of age, but he understood full well the grievous trouble and sorrow which had come upon them, and in his childish way did all he could to assist his mother. Not unfrequently of an evening, in

consequence of Agnes being so entirely taken up in attending to the wants of the sick man, the little fellow was left to himself. Sometimes he would go to his bed without even asking for his bit of supper ; he would have liked it, but never said so. He felt that it was not the time for expressing his own wants, with poor father lying there so still and pale, and mother sitting by his bedside, with her sad grave face, watching hour after hour ; so he would say his prayers, asking God to make dear father well, and then lying down would keep his eyes fixed on that corner of the room where his father lay dying, until his eyes became drowsy, the lids dropped, and he would fall asleep.

The night Philip Wilmott died, the little boy had laid himself down in his bed. He could not tell what it was, but he felt certain there was something terribly wrong. Father looked so ghastly pale—he lay so still on the mattress, with his eyes closed—not speaking, and apparently unconscious of all around him. But when the priest

came, the dying man seemed to have strength given him to join in the prayers offered for his soul, so soon to appear before its Judge. And as Johnnie listened to those beautiful petitions which the Church has provided for the comfort and consolation of her dying children, he fell asleep.

Poor child ! he did not know how very near his father was to the longest journey that man or woman can take, and which ends to the good and faithful ones of this earth in that eternal home which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9) ; and about which Johnnie had been taught as much as it was possible for one of his tender years. Yes, he fell asleep murmuring his childish prayers.

It was nearly morning when he awoke, and then he could hear his mother sobbing beside his father's bedside. He threw off the clothing that covered him, and ran across the room to her.

‘Mother!’ he asked, ‘tell me, is father worse?’ And he waited for a moment with wide open earnest eyes fixed upon her.

Then, getting no answer, he turned to his father and pleaded almost passionately, as he placed his little hand on that of the dead man’s: ‘Father! father! speak to me. Say that you will not leave me and poor mother all alone!’

But Philip Wilmott would never again hear the voice of his child. His soul had passed over to the eternal shores.

Johnnie at last understood how it was, and throwing his arms round his mother’s neck, tried to console her, saying:

‘Don’t take on so. Father’s gone to heaven, to be with Jesus and our Blessed Lady, where he’ll never have any more pain; and perhaps very soon God will send His beautiful angels and take us there too, like I heard Father Clifford ask Him to do for dear father last night, when he was praying by his bedside. Wouldn’t you like us to go, eh, mother?’

At first, the only response to this question which the bereaved wife gave was an

exceeding bitter cry, which so often goes up before God from the stricken soul.

After awhile Agnes Wilmott controlled herself sufficiently to speak to the little fellow ; and mother and child knelt side by side and said a short prayer for father's soul, which helped to calm and comfort them.

And then Johnnie, kissing his mother, crept back again to his bed.

For some time he could hear her sobbing ; but he tried not to cry any more himself, for he felt sure, with the trusting faith of a little child, that father *must* be so happy now he had gone to the beautiful City.

When it became known that Agnes had lost her husband, offers of kindly assistance came from more quarters than one. Mrs. Murphy, the washerwoman who lived close by, and had herself been left a widow with a large family to do for, stepped in the first thing in the morning after Philip Wilmott's death, to see what she could do to try and comfort the poor desolate young woman.

She found Agnes completely prostrate and exhausted, now that she was no longer needed by her husband. She had thrown herself down, overcome with fatigue.

After speaking a few words of sympathy to her, Mrs. Murphy beckoned Johnnie out of the room, to ask where the coals were kept.

‘Coals!’ he repeated; ‘we’ve no coals, nor yet sticks; mother used up the last yesterday.’

On hearing this the good woman made no remark, but quickly went back to her cottage, returning with some from her own little store; which she could ill afford, poor soul! but which, with the generosity of her class, she was so ready to give. Going down on her knees she soon made a nice bright fire, over which she placed the kettle, and then waited patiently until the water boiled; for, as she told Johnnie, she felt convinced if his mother could only take a nice fresh cup of tea, it would do her a world of good. Such was the faith she had in that beverage as being a remedy for maladies both mental and physical!

The little lad meanwhile kept close to his mother, watching with evident satisfaction the preparation for what was to effect so great an improvement ; and pleased enough he was when a tempting cup of strong tea was handed to her by Mrs. Murphy, who desired her to drink it off at once whilst it was hot.

Agnes did as she was requested, and felt somewhat revived. Thanking her neighbour for her kindness, she said that very likely she might now be able to take a little rest and sleep, of which she so sorely stood in need. This being the case Mrs. Murphy, having put the room somewhat tidy, said she would return to her work ; bidding Johnnie be a good boy, and not make a noise, but to be sure and let her know if his mother wanted anything.

CHAPTER VI.

‘GOOD-BYE, DEAR FATHER !’

‘And they shall see His face, and His Name shall be written on their foreheads, and night shall be no more ; and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.’—APOC. xxii. 4, 5.

‘ There God for ever sitteth,
Himself of all the crown ;
The Lamb the light that shineth,
And never goeth down.
Nought to this seat approacheth,
Their sweet peace to molest ;
They praise their God for ever,
Nor day, nor night they rest.’

SOME very sad and sorrowful days followed after the night on which Agnes lost her husband—days in which Johnnie often had a cry to himself. He sorely missed his father’s loving ways and kindly care, and wished him back again ; but he did not venture to say so after the *first* time, for he noticed whenever he spoke of father’s having left them, his mother would turn away and weep, and it distressed him beyond measure to see her do so. The morning came when the undertaker brought the long black coffin, in which he put Johnnie’s father. Kind Mrs. Murphy, notwithstanding she was extra busy with a larger amount of washing than usual, which had unexpectedly come in the previous day, threw her own work aside, although she knew full well she would in conse-

quence have to be up late at night in order to get through it. Yet nothing, she said, should prevent her being with the poor lone widow on this occasion ; for she knew only *too well*, from her own sad experience, how unfeeling like (as she expressed it) the undertaker was—not particular as regarded his manner towards those who were mourning the loss of their loved ones, and certainly wanting in respect to the dead. Yes! she minded well how Mr. Perkins behaved at the time of her poor Jim's death, and how he made her heart ache by his rough words and ways. And so she determined, let happen what would, to be with Johnnie and his mother.

Agnes, who had been watching and praying during the greater part of the night in the chamber of death, left the room on the arrival of Mr. Perkins. She could not trust herself to be present at such a trying time.

Little Johnnie sat crouched up in one corner of the room crying bitterly, as, unnoticed by the man, he watched him

performing his sad office. But when the lid was about to be screwed down, he rose up from his hiding-place, love for his father overcoming any fear he felt for the tall, cadaverous-looking undertaker, and going up to him, said, with great big tears in his eyes :

‘Please, sir, I should like just to see father’s face *once again*, and touch his hand, before he goes ;’ and he looked up so pleadingly, that although, as Mr. Perkins often observed, he didn’t hold with no *outward* show of mourning, for when it pleased the Almighty to take people out of this world, they who were left shouldn’t give way to *feelings*, but remember that when the right time came, we *must* go—and after *all*, there wasn’t *much* to mind, for life was a sad business, taking it altogether, from the cradle to the grave—yet when he saw the little fellow, with his streaming eyes, making this request, his naturally hard nature was touched at the sight, and lifting Johnnie in his arms, held him up whilst he leant over the coffin.

The child laid his little tear-stained cheek against the dead man's, kissed the cold still face for the last time, whispering, 'Good-bye, dear father, good-bye!' and then he allowed himself to be put down.

It did not take long to complete the work, and Mr. Perkins left the room, saying to Johnnie as he went out, 'Come, cheer up, little chap! it's no use your fretting; *that* won't bring your father back again!' and with these consoling words he disappeared.

When the undertaker shut-to the door, leaving Johnnie alone, the child threw himself down beside the coffin; his little heart seemed well-nigh bursting, and he sobbed aloud. At last his strength was thoroughly spent, and he could cry no more, and then he fell asleep.

A short time after, when Mrs. Murphy went into the room, she found Johnnie curled up on the floor, in a heavy slumber, his pale face still wet with the tears he had shed.

The next day the funeral took place; the poor young widow followed as chief

mourner, in the black clothes kind neighbours had lent for the occasion ; by her side walked little Johnnie, with some crape round his hat, which Mrs. Murphy had tied on, and then followed several of the poor, who had known Philip Wilmott, and wished to do what they could to show their respect for Agnes’s husband.

It was a mournful party that left the little cottage. Many of the villagers stepped out of their houses to watch the funeral as it passed by. A sorrowful time it was for Agnes, as she followed her husband to the grave. The day was fine, but the sunshine which brightened so many dwellings and cheered so many hearts, instead of lessening *her* grief, somehow made her feel *more sad*. The contrast between the clear sky overhead and the dark grave underneath seemed to deepen the gloom of the latter.

As Agnes listened to those beautiful and consoling words which the priest said when the corpse was placed by the side of the grave, ‘ I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me,

although he be dead, shall live: and everyone that liveth and believeth in Me, shall not die for ever,' she felt calmed and comforted. *Once*, however, as she heard the earth cast upon the coffin-lid, when it had been lowered into the grave, her poor feeble frame could scarce bear up, and had it not been for the timely assistance of one of those standing near, who observed how faint she looked, and helped to support her, in all probability she would have fallen.

Little Johnnie shivered as he stood clinging to his mother's dress, and cried very bitterly when he saw them put father so far out of sight.

The good priest, accustomed as he was to such scenes, could not help feeling deeply for the poor bereaved widow, and the pale, sad-faced little boy. After all was over he spoke a few kind, sympathising words to Agnes, and this helped her to leave the churchyard less cast down than she would otherwise have done.

It was very trying to go back to the empty room; to miss her husband's kind

smile and well-known voice, and to be reminded in so many ways that she should never see him again. How alone she seemed in the world! and yet she knew that such was *not* the case, for she did not doubt that He, the Comforter of the afflicted, the loving Saviour of mankind, in whom she trusted, was with her even now in this the hour of trial, and would not forsake His afflicted servant. Had she not, too, much cause for gratitude in the remembrance of the holy and peaceful end of her beloved husband, for whose soul she could daily offer up her prayers, united with the whole Catholic Church, in the one great sacrifice of the Mass?


She knew that all his suffering had been offered up to God, and willingly borne, in union with the sufferings of His Divine Son; and that though his soul might need purifying before being admitted into the presence of the beatific vision, yet he was *safe*. He had accomplished his earthly destiny, and for him all cares and sorrows were

for ever ended ; and with such thoughts as these, Agnes was comforted.

CHAPTER VII.

AGNES BIDS FAREWELL TO THE SCENES OF HER CHILDHOOD.

‘ Is it dark the pass before thee ?
Is the road unknown ?
Onward, though the storm be o’er thee,
Thou art not alone.
Onward bravely, God is near,
Guiding, guarding year by year.’

OOD, kind Mrs. Murphy did not go to the funeral, but remained behind to try and make the room look as little lonely as possible under the circumstances ; and when Agnes returned home, did all she could to assist and console her during the rest of the day. How many beautiful lessons we may all learn from the poor ! The sufferings nobly endured, and heavy burdens bravely borne, where can we look better than to them ? What *generosity* they teach us ! they show us how to be truly and greatly generous, in their willingness to share the last they

possess, whatever that may be, with a neighbour kindly and ungrudgingly, without a hope of return or reward. *Theirs* is not a generosity which costs them nothing ; it often entails going without a meal, or sitting by a fireless grate, but always a self-sacrifice of some sort. It is the highest and truest order, because the nearest to our great Pattern, whose generosity only reached its perfection on the Cross at Calvary, where the most perfect self-sacrifice was made that the world has ever known, and which nothing could go above or beyond.

We, my readers, are not called upon to lay down our lives, but our Divine Lord would have us make daily sacrifices for one another ; and amongst the poor, I think, we see this call answered as a rule more obediently and absolutely than anywhere else.

After the death of her husband, Agnes found it was necessary to leave the little cottage where she had spent so many happy years. Most of the furniture had to be sold for what it would fetch, to pay

the landlord to whom several weeks' rent was due, besides the doctor's bill, and other expenses incurred during Philip Wilmott's illness.

With the few remaining things that were left she furnished a room, which she rented from an old woman, who was pleased to have so respectable a person as Agnes for a lodger.

It was rather late and dark the evening the poor young widow left her once happy home to take possession of the somewhat dilapidated apartment in the house belonging to Mrs. Moore. Notwithstanding the scarcity of furniture, Agnes made the place look far better than one less orderly would have done.

There are those amongst the poor, who frequently fall into dirty slovenly habits, but Agnes had been taught that no household work is too trifling to be well done, and that whatever our circumstances may be, there is no excuse for being untidy and disorderly.

It did not take her very long to arrange the few things. The low truck

bed in one corner covered with the spotless white quilt, and in the opposite one an old chest of drawers, (which had once belonged to her mother), with an ancient tea-caddy on the top of it. These articles, with the addition of a small round table that had long since seen its best days, and three chairs, constituted the whole of Agnes's household possessions. Having finished her arrangements, she succeeded, after several attempts, in making a bright fire burn cheerily in the grate, and thus the room looked less dismal.

As time went on, Agnes Wilmott found it a terribly hard struggle to gain a sufficiency for the daily wants of herself and Johnnie. Many a time the poor woman would go to bed with the pangs of hunger unsatisfied ; but never a murmur escaped her lips.

Johnnie would sometimes cry, when he saw and knew his mother was in want. Then Agnes would speak to her child, and tell him of how Our Blessed Lord suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His

steps; how the Holy Babe of Bethlehem came to live this poor earth's life, and suffer pain and hunger—until the little boy would become quiet whilst he listened to the tale of the Infant Saviour, and kissing his mother, would wipe away his tears.

Often of a night, when Agnes had finished the allotted task which she had set herself for the day, and Johnnie was asleep in bed, she would stand and listen to his even breathing, and press a kiss on his fair brow, thanking God that although her trials were many, her precious child was spared her, and they two could be together.

There is no doubt life's road is hard and stony. Many a reader of these pages has already found this out, and many a one is yet destined to do so.

Some of us are cut by the stones' sharp points; some of us are bruised and wearied by slips and falls; more are wearied by having to climb from one rock to another, or are terrified by the great cliffs which overhang their path;

but let it vary how it may, the sad experience is that which is in one form or another the lot of almost all.

During one year Agnes managed to drag on in her poor lodging, by dint of sewing from morning till night at the plain work she obtained. The neighbours were kind and sympathising; but most of them were very poor, and in some cases almost as destitute as herself—finding it a difficult matter to keep anyway straight, with the little they could earn.

Agnes was much distressed on hearing, about this time, that the Squire, with all his family, had decided on leaving Ashington, with the intention of residing on the Continent, at least for one year. Thus she would be deprived of the chief means of support; for up to the present time she had constantly been supplied with needlework from the Hall (as Squire Costello's house was called).

At last, when the winter set in, the struggle for bare existence became harder and more terrible than ever. Often Agnes and her boy were miserably off for food;

and as to fire—coals had gone up in price, so that even in the bitterest weather they could but seldom have such a comfort, except Johnnie made a pilgrimage, and was fortunate enough to pick up sufficient wood to kindle one large enough to make the kettle boil or fry a herring ; but it was not often they had anything to cook. Bread and butter was what they chiefly made their meals on—meat being a luxury not to be thought of.

By degrees the little work she had hitherto managed to get, unaccountably fell off, and there seemed nothing before her but the Union; indeed this had been suggested to her long before, but Agnes shrank from the idea of going there.

What was to be done? Very plainly she saw that her child was drooping and fading out of the world, for want of proper food.

It was then that she determined on leaving her native village, and going to London, where she hoped to be able to procure employment. Having come to this decision, she sold the few bits of

furniture to her landlady for a trifling sum; and having put together what articles of clothing she possessed, Agnes Wilmott bade farewell to the scenes of her childhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST EXPERIENCES OF THE CITY.

‘Thy hand shall lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.’—Ps. cxxxviii. 9.

HAVING given my readers an insight into Agnes Wilmott’s former life, it is time they should return with me, and follow the poor young woman in her future career.

Both mother and child were all the better for their night’s rest. The next morning Mrs. Martin persuaded Agnes to remain until after mid-day, as she would then have had some dinner, and be better able to continue her journey.

It was close upon two o’clock when Agnes took leave of her kind friend and set off with her little boy to the station. The day was cold and lowering. In some

places the snow lay deep upon the ground, owing to the heavy fall of the two preceding days.

Agnes had not gone far when the snow again came down, the wind blowing it blindingly into the faces of those who had to battle against it. Some of the few she met on the way shouted out that if she had far to go she had best turn back ; but Agnes trudged on, and made no reply, and in a short time a turning in the road showed her that the railway-station was quite close at hand.

In another five minutes she had taken the tickets, and was just in time to hurry into a third-class carriage, pointed to by a porter who had observed her approach and told her to look sharp if she meant to go at all. A deep sigh escaped the poor girl as she seated herself in the crowded compartment, and timidly looked round at the occupants.

In one corner of the carriage sat a man who gave one the idea of being a miser. His coat was buttoned tightly round him, and his eyes had a keen, sharp, grasping

look about them, as if their owner would never lose an opportunity of getting money, nor make one for spending it. Immediately opposite Agnes was a country-looking woman with a fat child on her knee, who was very restless, and made sundry dives at the bundle Agnes carried. Her mother tried in vain to pacify her, by saying in a coaxing voice:

‘Now, Polly, be a good girl, and mother will give you something nice by-and-by.’

But as the ‘something nice’ was not forthcoming, the child set up a roar, and was only quieted by Johnnie giving her a biscuit he had.

At the other end of the carriage were some farmers discussing crops, fat stock, pasture-lands, etc., a topic they seemed to enjoy thoroughly.

Johnnie sat beside his mother; he was very silent at first, but after a while, when he found himself rattling along in the train to London, he began to chat with the liveliest interest of things he noticed as they sped along.

‘Have you ever been to London,

mother ?' he asked, speaking close to her, that she might hear above the din of the train.

' No, my dear,' she replied, ' I have never been there ; but father used to live in London before he settled down at Ashington.'

' It's a grand city, mother, isn't it ? I'm so glad we're going. Some of the boys down at our place said the streets are paved with gold in London !'

While he uttered the words he looked up in her face with an incredulous smile.

' No, no, Johnnie !' she said, as she smiled back at him. ' We must look *up* for gold and brightness; not *under foot* !'

Johnnie was rather puzzled as to what these words meant, but made no reply, for just then they arrived at the end of their railway journey.

At the station everything was in a state of bustle and confusion. Agnes asked the officials several times the way to Shoreditch ; but her inquiries were curtly responded to—everybody was too

busy to direct her to the locality she mentioned. One man, in a very off-hand manner, told her to take a cab. So she stepped out to the cab-stand, and looking from one to the other of the men she accosted a youngish respectable cabman, and asked him what he would charge to take her to Shoreditch.

‘What part do you want to go to?’ he asked.

‘If you would drive me as far as Anchor Street, that would do nicely,’ she replied; ‘for no doubt I could find my way to Crabtree Court, which I am told is close by. But I can’t afford much,’ she added.

‘Well, it’s rather an expensive drive in a cab, for you have come a long distance out of your way, coming to this yer Waterloo Station,’ the young man answered kindly. ‘But if you’ll take notice of what I’ll tell you, you can get there *cheap*, by taking the ’buses.’

He then gave her instructions, not forgetting to impress on her mind where she would have to change from one

omnibus to another, and the colours of those she must get into.

Agnes thanked him very heartily, feeling most grateful for having met with that bit of real disinterested kindness.

It was about four o'clock—just when London was getting dark, and the lamps were being lighted—when they reached Shoreditch. Both mother and child were thoroughly tired, and somewhat bewildered, as the conductor of the omnibus gave the usual signal for the driver to draw up to allow those who wished to get out, to do so.

‘Now then, missus, be sharp, if you’re going to step out here,’ said the man impatiently, as he saw Agnes uncertain as to what she should do. ‘If it’s *Anchor Street* you wants, you must walk a bit before you can get there; no ’buses don’t go down them back ways. I’ll lift the youngster out for yer,’ and, suiting the action to the word, he gave Johnnie a swing round on to the pavement.

There was a bitter wind ; and as they walked along they met men and women

muffled up in warm winter coats and comfortable woollen shawls. Johnnie shivered along, with his shoulders up to his ears, and a hand in each sleeve, trying to keep the cruel wind from cutting down his poor little neck at the back, and from stealing up his arms in front.

He had no warm jersey and drawers, like many of the boys he met, trotting along by their mother's side. Johnnie's clothing was of the thinnest and scantiest, and it was impossible to keep the cold out.

As Agnes had told Mrs. Martin, she was not quite sure of her cousin's address, but she remembered afterwards the name of the court, and the street which immediately led to it. However, as it was getting late, it seemed advisable to secure some place of shelter for the present, and she could afterwards decide as to where it would be best to put up altogether.

Of the first policeman they met, Agnes timidly asked if he could direct her to a lodging.

The man, after scanning Agnes from head to foot, said :

‘ Yes ; there’s Bilton’s place, within a few minutes’ walk from here, if you ain’t *pertickler* about your fellow-lodgers ! It’s *cheap*, anyhow ; and what’s *cheap* about *these* parts ain’t any way too nice. However, if you’re hard up for a place just now, you might make shift with it. All you’ve got to do is to keep yourself *to* yourself in such places as them. Walk straight on until you get to that *public* you see at the end of the street, then turn to your left, and anyone will show you which is the house.’

Agnes walked slowly on, Johnnie dragging at her dress in a manner that sorely taxed her strength. She took the turning mentioned by the policeman, and in a short time arrived at a house which a woman pointed out to her as ‘ Bilton’s,’ the door of which was open.

On looking in, Agnes saw four or five rough-looking men sitting in front of a large fire, smoking and drinking. A woman was busily engaged frying bacon

and potatoes, whilst at the farther end of the apartment two slovenly women sat huddled up, talking in an undertone, the subject of their conversation evidently being of an exciting nature. Now and then, as they raised their voices, Agnes could hear that some terrible fight had taken place, which had, they thought, terminated in the death of one of those engaged in the affray.

She stood undecided for a few moments as to what she should do, when a dispute arose between the men, and as the coarse, foul language they made use of fell upon her ears, she shrank back with a feeling of horror.

Had she then come to this? Could she take her child into such a place, where he would be forced to listen to the blasphemy and oaths which, even during the short time she had remained by the door, had been uttered by those half-human creatures. *No!* she would far rather he should suffer than herd with such a demoralised crew. *Poverty* she could bear; dry bread and scanty fare

she was ready to suffer, if she could only be where there was quietness and peace.

‘Come, Johnnie!’ she said! ‘come, my boy! We can’t go in *there*. I am very sorry for *your* sake, for I know how tired you are; but *I’ll* help you along, and you’ll see we shall get a place where you can have a nice rest.’

But Johnnie made no answer. Poor child! his feet were tired, and his head heavy and aching; his lips quivered, and he would have burst into tears, but he did not like to distress his mother, so he quietly brushed away with the sleeve of his little jacket the few that would not keep back.

Again the two paced on, until they came to a small shop in the window of which were a variety of articles for sale, consisting of herrings, candles, lardy cakes, boot-laces, pins, apples; and in the very centre was placed a large dish containing ‘bundles of mystery,’ sold at a penny each when *hot*, but reduced to half that price when cold.

These mysterious bundles are much

liked by the poor in London, and generally get a ready sale.

A bill, too, appeared in the window announcing the fact that 'hot pea-soup,' at 1d. per pint, could be had within twice a week.

Jeremiah Pringle, the owner of this shop, prided himself on the excellency of his pea-soup, and it was astonishing the number of pints he disposed of amongst his poor, half-starved neighbours. His wife, who was getting on in years, and suffered with the rheumatics, declared that *Tuesdays* and *Thursdays* were awful trying times, for she was on her legs a'most all day, and went through a martyrdom with tending the soup for so many hours; but *that* she supposed wasn't of *no* consequence, so long as her old man could fill his pockets with the money it brought in.

As Agnes stepped into the shop to buy some of the lardy cakes (which were most tempting, so Johnnie thought) Mr. Pringle was standing behind the counter, ready to attend to any customers who might require his services.

He was a sharp-faced little man, and what is called a *hard* man. Now a hard man is one of the worst things in the world; one with whom his fellows can do nothing; and such a one was Jeremiah Pringle.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. MULLIGAN'S LODGINGS.

‘For He hath given His angels charge over thee: to keep thee in all thy ways.—Ps. xc. 11.

HAVING made her purchase of the cakes, Agnes ventured to ask Mr. Pringle if he could direct her to a respectable lodging.

‘Direct you to a respectable lodging,’ said the old man, repeating her words slowly, and looking at her with a hard, suspicious stare. ‘*Well!* it’s not in *my* line exactly to do *that* sort of thing, ‘specially when I knows *nothing* of the party as asks me. *But,*’ he continued, ‘if you waits a minute, I’ll ask my missus; p’r’aps she might be able to tell

you of some place ;' and with this Jeremiah Pringle, going to a door which led into a small sitting-room, called out in a far from modulated voice, ' I say, Nancy, you're *wanted* : step in, will yer !'

Nancy soon appeared, in not the most amiable temper, for it was '*Tuesday*,' and, as usual, she had been much occupied in the soup trade, not only making it, but dealing it out in the cans and jugs for those who came to purchase, so that, as she expressed it, she was pretty nigh beat.

' *Well!* and what do you want *now*, that you can't let a body have a minute's peace ?' she asked, addressing her husband.

' *I* don't want nothing,' replied Jeremiah, 'but this yer young woman *do* She would be glad to know if you could tell her of a lodging to put up at.'

On hearing this Nancy raised her hand to her forehead, as if in profound meditation ; then bringing it down with a bang on the counter, exclaimed :

' I'm blessed if I can think of one just now, unless Mrs. Mulligan's got her top

garret empty, which I fancy may very likely be the case.'

As this conversation was going on, *who* should enter the shop but the very identical person in question!

'*Well, to be sure!*' said Mrs. Pringle; 'why, Mrs. Mulligan, if you ain't the *very one* we was a-talking of!'

'No *'arm*, I hope? May I ask what you *was* a-saying?' inquired Biddy Mulligan.

'*Well*, to tell you the truth,' said old Pringle, 'my missus and I was a-mentioning to our customer here as how we thought you might be willing to let a room to her, if so be you had one to spare; that's the long and short of it.' Then Jeremiah leant both his elbows on the counter, and waited to hear what answer would be given.

Biddy Mulligan turned round, and having inspected Agnes to her satisfaction, said:

'*Yes*, Mr. Pringle, you are right *so far*: I *have* a room to let, as anyone can see as looks at the card hanging in my window. But I don't care to let to *every-*

one; I only takes in *respectable*, *decent* folks' (and she emphasized the two adjectives), 'as you knows quite well, Mr. Pringle. I'd rather, *far* rather let my place bide empty then 'ave any other but such as I mentions. Didn't I turn Sally Webb out, 'cos she was such a slattern, going about as she did, with her gownd all in rents, and her hair for all the world like a door-mat? *No*, I can't stand such ways. If I *be* a lone widdy, I'll let people know that Biddy Mulligan can keep herself as a respectable woman should.'

Having come to an end of this somewhat long oration, Biddy addressed herself to Agnes :

'*Well!*' she said, 'you *looks* decent, so I'll take you in. Maybe I'm not doing a *wise* thing, letting to a total stranger, but for *once* I'll run the risk; that's to say, if you're ready to pay a week's rent in advance.'

'What is it?' inquired Agnes anxiously.

'One-and-nine,' replied Biddy, 'and

you must put the money *down* before you takes possession. I've been cheated more than *once* since I took to letting lodgings, and I ain't going to be played that trick no more, if *I* knows it!

Notwithstanding the permission to become an inmate in Mrs. Mulligan's house was not a very gracious one, Agnes was thankful to pay the required sum, which she placed in her future landlady's hand, and which was carefully counted, and quickly pocketed by the old woman.

It did not take Bidly long to purchase the quartern loaf, herring, and half-ounce of mixed tea, and then bidding Mr. Pringle and his wife good-evening, she left the shop accompanied by Agnes and Johnnie.

Through one dingy street after another Bidly Mulligan went on, followed by Agnes, until she turned down a somewhat large court, into which the bright sunshine seldom found entrance. Most of its inhabitants were costermongers, as the donkey-carts, baskets, old fish-boxes

and refuse, shells and vegetables, which almost blocked up the cramped roadway, showed at a glance ; but the minority of the court's population was a strange medley.

It was at a house at the end of this court that Biddy at length paused. Having opened the door with a latch-key, she bid Agnes wait, whilst she struck a match and lighted a candle, then mounted up three flights of narrow stairs, which were very steep and dark, so that both mother and child had to be careful, or they would have stumbled.

'Now, young woman,' said Biddy, '*here* you are,' and she pushed open the door of a little attic.

Agnes looked round at what would in all probability be her future home. The place was certainly very small, the ceiling slanting, and in some places so low as to make it necessary to stoop. The floor was uneven, and the only window, if one might judge by the size, could not yield much light at the best of times. The furniture was in keeping with the room,

but the place looked clean, and they would have it to themselves, so Agnes felt thankful in taking possession.

‘Ain’t you brought no box with you?’ inquired Biddy.

‘This is all I have,’ replied Agnes, showing her bundle; ‘but I hope to get work, and then I shall be able to buy the few things I most stand in need of.’

‘Humph!’ muttered Biddy Mulligan. ‘It’s a bad look-out for you I’m thinking, if ye’re counting on what you’ll get in the way of work. Why, this yer neighbourhood is swarming with them as wants to earn a living. However, I may find you a job or two, if you’re handy with your needle, and don’t ask too much for what you do.’

Agnes thanked the landlady for her promise of help. Mrs. Mulligan having made a few remarks as to the low rent she asked for the room, and wishing it to be clearly understood the reason for her having done so was on account of various damages done to the place by its late occupant, Sally Webb, bid Agnes good-

night, and made her way downstairs to her own apartment.

Agnes took off her wet shawl and sodden boots, telling Johnnie to undress, after which she wrapped him up in the one blanket they possessed. The little boy soon began to feel all the better for the change, and was quite content to keep quiet and watch his mother whilst she kindled a fire and made some tea; and very much he enjoyed it too, with one of the lardy cakes bought at Mr. Pringle's shop.

In the course of another hour Johnnie was fast asleep, whilst Agnes sat on by the fire, thinking of all that had happened since she had left Ashington. Very thankful she was, for having secured a resting-place for herself and child, even though it was but a miserable garret.

Before she undressed she did her best to make the casement a little more weather-proof, by filling up some parts of the broken glass with paper, until she should be able to do something more effectual on the morrow; for, as it was, the

current of air which blew through every now and then almost extinguished the flickering flame of the tallow candle. But she was too tired to care much for anything just then but *rest*; so, after an earnest prayer, she lay down trustful and content.

Agnes believed that for whatever the morrow, and all the days to come, might bring, she would receive help and strength according to her need, as she had ever done in times past, so heart and mind were able to rest.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. ARCHER AND LITTLE NELL.

‘All thy children shall be taught of the Lord :
and great shall be the peace of thy children.’—
ISAIAH liv. 13.

BIDDY MULLIGAN let lodgings to make a living, as she said.

As a rule it answered remarkably well, and during the six years she had lived at No. 9, Barrett's Court, had been regularly paid by those who rented

her rooms, except on two or three occasions.

The last time such a thing had happened was only a fortnight before Agnes came, when Mrs. Moriarty, the second-floor lodger, with her family, had taken their departure early one morning during Biddy's absence, leaving their rent, which was in arrears, unpaid. They had slyly carried off their things in the dark unobserved. Joe Moriarty, the husband, was suspected of having been engaged in some robbery, and the eldest girl had narrowly escaped detection while stealing goods from a shop-door in the neighbourhood; so they deemed it advisable to remove to a quarter where they were unknown.

One or two of the inmates of Barrett's Court were in the secret; but when questioned by Biddy as to whether they knew anything of what had taken place, feigned perfect ignorance.

They admired the clever contrivance of the Moriartys, and having a spite against Mrs. Mulligan, who was very

unpopular with them, enjoyed the discomfiture of the landlady when she knew of their flight.

When Agnes became an inmate of No. 9, there were three other sets of lodgers besides herself. A cabman with his wife and children occupied the second-floor rooms ; over them lived a laundress and her two daughters ; and in the back garret immediately opposite Agnes a woman of the name of Archer, with her child, a little girl of ten. Mrs. Archer was a charwoman, and her habits being clean and tidy, she was very much liked in the house where she worked, and generally had enough to do ; but she had a great trouble with little help or comfort, and now she worked on because it was her nature, but without heart or hope. She had had a warm heart, but it was as if the snows of winter had fallen on it ; and if it had not killed the life and love below, it kept it all quite still—not dead, but never acting.

Kate Archer had been deserted by her husband for many years, and had

followed all her children to the grave—all but the poor crippled little Nellie, whom from the cradle she had loved best of all, and nursed with care, and thought to save ; but the doctor told her it was all of no use, the girl would never live to grow up, and the hope died out of Kate Archer's heart.

It was sad for her to be obliged to leave the poor child as she did, day after day, whilst she went out to work. Nellie had been a cripple all her life. The years of her life indeed were not many, but they seemed long to her, as the weeks passed drearily by, and she sat in her lonely garret with no one to speak to, and nothing to look at but the sooty roofs and smoking chimneys of the houses opposite.

Mrs. Archer and Nellie missed Mrs. Moriarty, and were sorry to lose her ; they did not care for her husband or daughter. But Mrs. Moriarty was a frank, kind-hearted woman, and had always done what she could for the cripple girl and her mother. Blunt in her ways, and thrift-

less in her habits, she was as ready to give to those poorer than herself, as she was ready to receive from those who were richer.

Nellie shed many tears when she heard of the Moriartys' departure. *Now* there would be no one to carry her down the dark, steep stair, and place her in her seat below, in the courtyard; for when her mother left for work it was too early in the morning for Nellie to go out; so that if Mrs. Moriarty had not done the neighbourly act, seldom would she have had the change.

All through the long, long, dark winter months, the little girl looked forward to the summer days when she would be able to sit in the yard for an hour or two; and now she greatly feared that that one bright spot in her sad life was lost to her.

Nellie Archer, poor child, was sadly ignorant, for she had never been to school, and her mother gave no thought to her little girl beyond what concerned her body. She had not been baptized; indeed Mrs. Archer's idea of Christianity

consisted in keeping her place *clean*, and herself and child as tidy and respectable as her circumstances would admit. The name of God was only known to the cripple as she heard it mixed up with oaths that reached her as she sat up in her silent garret.

The evening Agnes Wilmott and Johnnie took up their abode at Biddy Mulligan's, Nellie was waiting for her mother's return, supported by a pillow and an old cushion; she was half-lying, half-sitting on the bed, trying to mend her old frock, which really seemed past mending. The sheets and counterpane were coarse and not very white, but they were clean, and so was Nellie's face. The attic, though small and somewhat damp, had an air of neatness about it; for the few tin articles arranged on the mantelshelf were as bright as silver. The discoloured walls were covered with bright-coloured pictures, and the well-brushed grate showed that the room belonged to an industrious and orderly person.

Hearing strange voices and people moving about, a start of pleasure ran through Nellie's frame. Poor child ! she longed for *any* change.

' Perhaps,' she thought to herself, ' the garret's let !'

If only she could find out !

Just then old Biddy passed by the door, and Nellie could not resist calling out, and asking, by way of an excuse, if she would give the fire a stir, as it had got so low. Now, to tell the truth, Biddy Mulligan was very partial to Nellie, and, although she had long lived alone, was naturally sociable, and often sighed for the day when her *own* daughter Peggy, with her sunny smiles and merry chatter, gladdened her home. Ah ! those were *happy times* ! but Peggy was thoughtless and vain, and much too fond of finery ; she became acquainted with some giddy companions, who persuaded her to leave her mother, in order (as they said) that she might enjoy herself, and see a little more of the world ; and so one day the foolish girl left her home

and never returned again. Her poor mother had made every inquiry, but all in vain, and had never been able to gain any tidings of her. It was a great trouble to Biddy, and still pressed heavily on her spirits. She would at times, when Nellie was too ill to leave her bed, go in and sit with her ; and as she watched the child's pale face with the bright golden hair around it on the scanty pillow, her deep blue eyes with their far-away look, and, in spite of all her sufferings, her uncomplaining smile, the old woman would think of her own lost child, and feel that willingly she would see her like Nellie, passing away from earth. Yes, *far* rather part with her thus, than believe, as she had too much reason to do, that Peggy was leading a life of infamy and sin.

When Biddy heard Nellie calling to her, she bustled into the room.

‘ Well, my dear, and what’s it you’re wanting ?’ she asked.

‘ Oh, Mrs. Mulligan, will you be so good as to see to the fire ? it’s well-nigh out, and

mother will be needing a cup of tea when she comes in—such a cold night as it is.'

'You're right, Nellie,' replied Biddy, 'and glad enough you'll be, I should say, when your mother *do* come; for it must be terrible lonesome for you to bide so many hours all by yourself, day after day.'

Having made up the fire, Biddy, much to Nellie's satisfaction, seated herself in a chair close to the bed, saying she would stop and keep her company until Mrs. Archer's return.

'Well, well!' Biddy began, 'you've got some one in the other room again; and a decent sort of soul, I should say, from what I can make out. Poor thing! she looks awful weak and ailing; and it strikes me, if she don't soon pick up and get some flesh on them bones of hers, she won't trouble me nor no one else long.'

'Is she *quite* alone?' inquired Nellie. 'I fancied I heard a child's voice!'

'No doubt you did, Nell, for she has along with her as purty a little chap as my eyes have fell on for many a long day. He don't look no ways fitted to

live in these yer parts, amongst the rough low set as swarms about the court. From the little I've gathered, his mother don't appear to have no friends; and I dare say, if the truth were known, she's had hard times of it, like the rest of us—for this is a terrible world for poor folks to live in.'

How long Biddy might have continued talking it would be difficult to say, had she not been interrupted by the entrance of Nellie's mother.

'Ah, Mrs. Archer! it's you, is it?' said Biddy. 'I've just been telling your gal how I've let the garret; but I won't stop no longer now you've come home. You'll be glad to take off them wet things of yours and give yourself a warm, after being out in the rain. Nell will tell you what little there is to hear, so I'll be off.'

And with this Biddy left the room, and went downstairs to her own apartment.

CHAPTER XI.

AGNES IN HER TROUBLE AND DISTRESS
PAYS A VISIT TO THE PAWN-SHOP.

‘In Christ’s dear Name with courage bear
Whatever ills betide ;
For worldly good is oft a snare,
And fills the heart with pride.
What seems a loss will often prove
To be our truest gain,
And pains endured with patient love,
A jewelled crown obtain.’

T so happened that the winter Agnes Wilmott went to London was a very hard one. Work was scarce, wages low, provisions were dear, and many of the poor were half-starved. Everyone said that it was the worst time that had been known for years ; and there seemed no prospect of improvement while the cold weather lasted.

A month had passed by since the evening Agnes had taken the lodging at Biddy Mulligan’s house. Agnes Wilmott had suffered much during that time, in the way of privations ; but her landlady knew little of this, for she had

regularly received her money for the rent on the day it fell due. Now and then Agnes had done a little sewing for her, for which she was but ill paid, and she had, too, got a job of work from some others through Biddy.

All this time the days were shortening and getting colder. It was quite impossible for Agnes to make any additions to her own or Johnnie's scanty stock of clothing, and they suffered much in consequence. The struggle for life seemed to be desperate; and had it not been for her child, thankfully would she have closed her weary eyes upon the world.

What was it that helped her to bear her sad lot without a murmur? It was this, my dear readers: Agnes, in all her trials and difficulties through life, had been faithful to her religious duties, faithful to the teaching of the Church. She had sought for help and strength where alone they can be found, in those channels appointed by Our Blessed Lord Himself, the Sacraments of His Church.

Was she poor, suffering, and without friends? She thought of the humility and great love of Our Lord in the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation ; of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem ; of Jesus always in poverty. And with the remembrance of what Our Lord had suffered during His life on earth, Agnes would bow her head in submission to the will of God, to whom her heart was given, and strive to see Christ in all her trials, knowing that He would not send her more than she could bear.

The inhabitants of Barrett's Court were a godless set, and from the first Agnes was disliked by almost everyone who lived there. They looked upon her as 'stuck up' and bumptious, and as thinking a mighty lot of herself, because she did not drink and wrangle like her neighbours. She had no business there, Papist as she was, coming amongst them just to spy on all they did.

Agnes had to put up with a good deal of bullying insult from the slatternly, brazen-faced young women and foul-

tongued men and boys when she went to and from the court. On a Sunday morning she and Johnnie managed to get off quietly to Mass, for most of the inhabitants, when the church bells were ringing, were keeping holiday in bed : some sleeping off the effects of excessive drinking, and others snuggling between their poor blankets because, thin and scanty as they were, it saved coals and increased comfort to put off lighting still more meagre fires. But her return home was, generally speaking, a time for the roughs, who stood lolling by their doors, to make their coarse remarks on the widow and her little boy. Agnes shrank painfully from their insulting language ; but anything she might suffer was amply compensated for by the comfort and happiness she experienced when she was in church, kneeling before the Tabernacle, pouring out all her sorrows. Jesus, she knew, was there, waiting to listen to those who came to cast their cares before Him, and in His Sacred Heart to find repose.

Once again in her little attic, she would rejoice that whatever her trials might be, she possessed the priceless treasure of the true faith, which none could take from her ; and that if she persevered, in God's grace, to the last, the storms of this life would soon pass away, to be followed by the never-ending joys of eternal happiness.

Agnes Wilmott suffered daily more and more, and although she never complained, her looks told plainly how ill she was ; but none of the neighbours troubled themselves about her, except to remark that she seemed a poor weakly creature.

One day, when Johnnie had in vain asked his mother for more food, which she was unable to give him, Agnes could bear it no longer ; she felt she must do something to obtain bread and a few coals, for she knew her child was suffering. At length she determined on parting with some of her few remaining clothes. Her stock of worldly goods was small, but from them she took two or three.

Having wrapped them up in an old black apron, she told Johnnie she would soon return, and that he should have some tea when she came back.

As Agnes set out in search of one of those shops whose sign is three 'golden balls,' the short winter afternoon was closing in, but the street still swarmed with dirty, ragged children. Women with pinched, careworn faces, and untidy, bonnetless heads, stood at the open door of the houses, or, worse still, were congregated round the entrance of the numerous gin-palaces; some watching wearily for the husband or son who was inside squandering the price of the bread and coal for want of which they were shivering. Others, alas! were no strangers themselves to drink.

Agnes Wilmott's heart turned sick as she noticed a young woman come out of one of these places intoxicated, and push aside with a horrible oath a little girl, evidently her own, who, crying with hunger, was wailing piteously for her wretched mother. Quickly she passed

by, and threading her way along one or two narrow streets, came to the shop she was seeking.

This was the first time Agnes had ever pawned anything, and it grieved her to part with Johnnie's little summer suit, and a pair of trousers which had belonged to her husband; but she was determined to get food somehow, and consoled herself with the thought that perhaps it would only be for a short time—soon she might have work, and then she would be able to redeem them.

As Agnes entered the shop, 'Old Moses' was busily engaged with a customer, so she stood on one side until he was ready to attend to her; then she untied her bundle, and waited anxiously to hear what the Jew would offer. The trousers were well inspected, and pronounced to be much the worse for wear; whilst the little suit was considered hardly worth taking. However, much to Agnes's relief, the pawnbroker gave better prices than she expected.

On her way home she bought some

oatmeal, a loaf of bread, and a small supply of coal. Having laid out her money, as she thought, to the best advantage, Agnes tied up the provisions in the apron which had previously contained the clothes.

Instead of returning the usual way to Barrett's Court, she went round by Hoxton Square, wishing to go into the church for a few minutes, to tell her beads, and pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Just as she was about to enter she thought she saw something on the ground, half-hidden amongst the heap of dust at one side, that was hard and shining ; stooping to reach it, that she might examine what it was, she picked up a handsome gold locket with diamonds, which even in the dim light sparkled with great brilliancy. There was no one else passing by at the time, and even had there been, the generality of those who passed to and fro in that neighbourhood would not be likely to possess so costly an ornament ; for although Agnes was not in any way experienced in jewellery, she felt

sure what she had found was valuable. After staying a short time she left the church, carefully wrapping up the locket in her handkerchief, and putting it into her pocket. She had no intention to sell it, or get money for it, as many might have been tempted to do in her circumstances. Had she chosen, she might easily have done so, for there are those in London who are only too ready to purchase things that are dishonestly come by ; but Agnes knew her duty was to restore it, if possible, to its owner.

Walking hurriedly along through the busy streets, she soon reached her home in Barrett's Court. Johnnie was seated on the topmost step of the stairs waiting for his mother. He was full of eager expectation at her coming, thinking she would have made several purchases with what was realised by the pawning of the clothes ; he was depending upon a fire for one thing, to warm his poor little body by, and perhaps something hot for tea. He had been sitting there alone in the

dark, until Mrs. Archer, pitying the child, had asked him into her room to sit with Nellie ; but Johnnie said he thought mother wouldn't be long before she came, and sure enough just then he heard the street-door open.

'Well, my boy,' said Agnes, 'I've brought you something to eat; and what's more, you'll have a bit of fire!'

Johnnie's face brightened at the good news, and he set to work quickly to break up the sticks for his mother to light the fire with, which was soon kindled, and close to which he sat, warming himself. Very glad he was, too, for the small basin of oatmeal (a very small one it was, because some had to be put away for the morrow). Poor little fellow, he was ravenously hungry, for he had had only a morsel of bread early that morning.

'*Do* eat, mother,' he said, pushing the basin towards her ; but Agnes shook her head ; it was as much as she could do to eat the piece of bread which she sopped in her cup of tea.

Scarcely had they finished their meal

when Mrs. Archer knocked at the door, and walking in, said she wished to have a few words about some work she had heard of, and which she thought Agnes might be glad to get.

‘To tell you the truth, Mrs. Wilmott,’ she said, ‘I think as how this may prove a fine opening for you. I’ve been working for the last few days up to Lady Grenville’s, and it seems they’re expecting a mighty lot o’ company, so that the house is to be cleaned from top to bottom. Just afore I was coming away this evening, Mrs. Simpson (that’s the house-keeper, you know) she says to me, “Mrs. Archer, do you know any respectable woman down your way you could bring with you to-morrow to help clean?” “*That I do*, Mrs. Simpson!” I says, “as steady and honest a body as ever stepped in shoe-leather” (all the time I was speaking, my mind was running on *you*, Mrs. Wilmott). “Well, then,” she says, “that’s right, Mrs. Archer! I hope you won’t fail me, for her ladyship can’t bear to have the place anyways out of order,

and with an extra hand we shall soon get on." Now *that's* the *long* and *short* of what I've got to say.'

Agnes listened to all Mrs. Archer was telling her, and most thankful she was at the prospect of getting employment.

'Well, then,' said Mrs. Archer in conclusion, 'as you ain't noways engaged elsewhere, you'll make up your mind and come along with me to-morrow morning. I starts at seven o'clock, so I hope you'll be ready. All I can tell you is, that you'll work for as nice a lady as you could wish to meet with. There ain't no *pride* about her; she's quite affable like, when she speaks to one, for all she's so rich. But *there!* *real* quality folks don't give themselves no airs! I've heard Mrs. Simpson say, *scores* of *times*, how much her ladyship (and Miss Grenville *especially*) gives away amongst the poor. Ah! and not only *gives money*, but what's more, goes *themselves* amongst the sick, and them as stands in need of help. They're of the same religion as yourself, Mrs. Wilmott, and the young


lady, Miss Edith (so I was told), was down at the Catholic Church this afternoon. I only wishes there was a few more like *her*; it would be a blessing to many a poor soul, *I'm* sure!

Finally it was arranged that Agnes was to accompany Mrs. Archer the following morning to Lady Grenville's house, and Johnnie, during his mother's absence, should stay with little Nellie.

CHAPTER XII.

AGNES RESTORES THE LOST LOCKET TO ITS RIGHTFUL OWNER.

'Perfect Thou my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps be not moved.'—Ps. xvi. 5.

HEN Mrs. Archer had left the room, Agnes took the locket out of her pocket, and showed it to Johnnie.

'Oh, mother!' he exclaimed, 'won't you get a lot of money for such a beautiful thing! Why, if you sell it, we shan't

want for a long time!' and the child's eyes sparkled when he thought what *might* be in store for them.

But Agnes tried to explain to her little boy how displeasing such an act of dishonesty would be in the sight of God. She well knew what a treasure a few pounds would be, especially at the *present time*; how many difficulties would be got rid of, how much it would buy, and how it would smooth the rough path in which they were treading. And did it not appear to be *purposely* meant, that she should have picked up the locket, so that at least she might reap the benefit of a reward, which no doubt would be offered? Such an idea as this, however, Agnes rejected. She felt, as all honest persons do, that it was no more than her duty to endeavour to find out the owner and return it.

Telling Johnnie to put away the tea-things, and then go to bed, Agnes put on her shawl and bonnet, for she determined to go, without further delay, to the Presbytery, and ask the advice of

one of the priests as to how she ought to act in the matter.

It did not take her very long to reach the house; and after waiting a few minutes, Father Bernard entered the little room Agnes had been shown into. She soon told him the object of her visit. Having heard all she had to say, the priest (who was rejoiced to find that even in the midst of poverty there were those who preferred to suffer rather than act against their conscience) told her that very probably the locket belonged to a lady who had been to the church that afternoon. He recommended her to go at once to the house, the address of which he would give her.

Before she left, Father Bernard put a shilling into her hand, telling her, as it was getting late, and the lady lived some distance from Hoxton, she had better get into an omnibus, which would take her a good way on her journey. He asked her, too, several questions as to her circumstances, kindly giving permission for Johnnie to attend the school

without payment, until she had it in her power to give the pence for the usual fee.

Thus instructed, Agnes, having thanked the good priest, commenced her important journey. The omnibus only took her part of the way, and then she had to walk some distance. She proceeded through the busy streets with the locket securely tied up in a little parcel. She was obliged to inquire several times the way, until she reached the house near the park to which her steps were directed. It was a grand-looking house, though not *half* as grand *outside* as it was inside. The door was just being shut by a footman as Agnes came up. She immediately seized the opportunity of asking whether Lady Grenville lived there.

‘Yes, she does,’ he replied, ‘but it’s rather late; besides, her ladyship is not at home this evening.’

The look of disappointment on Agnes’s face led the man to inquire if it was anything particular she had come about, or if she had been desired by Lady Grenville to call.

‘No,’ replied Agnes, ‘her ladyship does not even know me; but I was directed by one of the Fathers at Hoxton Square to see the lady if possible, as it is of importance.’

‘Oh, if *that's* the case, come inside then,’ said the man; and Agnes found herself waiting in a large hall, whilst he went to inquire if she could be seen.

Presently a very neat-looking maid came and desired Agnes to follow her. She was glad she had rubbed her boots well when entering the house, for the richly-carpeted staircase, up which she now went, looked as if a speck of dirt was never seen upon it. At the top of the staircase was a long passage or gallery, the end of which led into a conservatory, filled with beautiful plants. Several doors opened into this gallery. The maid-servant tapped at one of them, and somebody said, ‘Come in.’

Lying on a couch, with a book in her hand, was a slight fair young lady, very simply attired in a plain black silk dress.

Edith Grenville, for she it is of whom

I am now speaking, was the only daughter of Sir Claude and Lady Grenville. Surrounded as she was with all the comforts and luxuries that riches can bestow, she was not unmindful of those whose lot in life was different to her own.

The fashions, frivolities, and the opinions of the world did not occupy her thoughts and time, to the exclusion of better things.

Charity to the poor and destitute, exercised actively and generously, was to Edith Grenville a pleasure as well as a duty. The world has its theory of religion, but the religion which is approved before God and the Father is the only religion which will serve us at the last day. And to all who in the midst of life's cares and daily employments forget not to visit the sick and needy, let them remember how bright will be their reward when Christ Himself shall thank them for their services of love and mercy; for has He not said, Amen, as long as you did it to one of these My least

brethren, you did it unto Me?' (St. Matt. xxv. 40).

Miss Grenville looked up when Agnes, entering with the servant, stood just inside the door, and made a respectful courtesy.

'What is it you wish to see Lady Grenville about so particularly?' she asked in a low sweet voice.

Agnes stepped forward, and opening the little paper parcel took out the locket, which she handed to the young lady, at the same time telling her in a straight-forward manner all the circumstances connected with the finding of it, with which my readers are already familiar.

Directly Miss Grenville saw the locket, she exclaimed: 'Yes, this is the locket I lost this afternoon, and which I feared I should not recover. We intended to-morrow having some bills printed to put in the shop-windows, but your having acted so honestly in bringing it back at once will save us the trouble of doing so. And now, I am most pleased to give you

two pounds, the sum I intended offering as a reward. I hope it will compensate you in some measure, although I am sure the consciousness of having acted as you have will be a still greater reward.'

'Indeed, ma'am,' said Agnes, colouring, 'I am extremely obliged to you, but I could not for one moment think of taking the money; I have only done what I knew to be my duty, and I do not desire to be paid for being honest.'

As Edith Grenville looked at the young woman standing before her, she was somewhat surprised at the refusal. Here was one who no doubt was poor and in need, whose appearance only too plainly told of suffering and illness, yet unwilling to take any reward, which most persons under similar circumstances would not have hesitated to have done.

'Well, my good woman,' said Miss Grenville, 'I will not pay you for bringing back the locket, but you must allow me to give you a sovereign for your time and trouble; this at least you cannot object to.'

It was not, however, without some hesitation that Agnes took the money Miss Grenville placed on the table; but she felt it would not do to refuse the kind lady's gift.

What would not such a sum do for herself and Johnnie! How many weeks it would keep them from want, and help to pay the rent of their room! As all this flashed through her mind, tears of gratitude stood in her eyes.

'I can't tell you, ma'am, how grateful I am,' she said, 'for your kindness to me.'

Before Agnes left, Miss Grenville asked her many questions about her home and friends, for she felt interested to know something of her history.

Agnes was soon won by the kind and gentle manners of the young lady to give an account of the last few years of her life, and spoke unreservedly as to the anxiety she felt respecting the future, both as regarded herself and child.

'In what way,' inquired Miss Grenville, 'are you trying to gain your livelihood? perhaps I may be able (if not

now, at least at some future time) to assist you in getting employment.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Agnes. 'I am most used to needle-work, and much prefer it; but since I have been in London, with the exception of a few odd jobs my landlady has given me, I have not been able to get any. I am now going to see if I can manage charing; I almost fear it's beyond my strength, but I must do my best. Mrs. Archer, who lodges in the same house as myself, has kindly got a day's work for me. To-morrow I am to go to a lady's house: I don't know where it is, but I believe it's some distance from our place; she did mention the lady's name, but it's entirely slipped my memory.'

'And where are you living?'

'At No. 9, Barrett's Court, Shore-ditch, ma'am.'

'Did you say the person's name was *Archer*? if so, I fancy I've heard it before, and that she is the woman our housekeeper engages to come and assist when she requires extra cleaning done.'

‘Yes, ma’am ; she’s a widow with an only child, a little cripple girl. I don’t know much about them, but I fear hers is a sad history. From the little I’ve gathered, it appears that the poor woman is, like most of those living in the court, without much thought beyond this world. Indeed, ma’am, it’s terrible to live where I do, in the midst of one’s fellow-creatures who never mention God’s Name except when cursing and swearing.’

‘And is there no one to visit those who are ill and in distress, or to speak to them on religion ?’

‘Well, ma’am, there’s what they call a Bible woman comes round, and reads a chapter or two to those who will listen to her ; but they do it, knowing they will have a soup-ticket and other help, and no sooner is she out of the place than they turn all she has been saying into ridicule. She found her way up to my little attic about a fortnight ago, but I soon let her know I was a Catholic, and would not read the tracts she wished to leave with me. My child

was in the room, and happened to have his rosary in his hand, and she asked him what it was. I could scarce keep from smiling, when he answered with a look of astonishment, "Why my beads, to be sure! which I use when I pray to our Blessed Lady. Father Denis gave them to me. Haven't you got a rosary?" Oh my! ma'am; you should have heard how she went on about people being benighted with such Popish mummary. She never gave me a chance to put in a word, although I tried hard to tell her more than once that I could not allow my religion to be spoken of in that irreverent manner. However, from that day she has never come near me, I'm thankful to say, and I hope she *never will*. But I must ask your pardon for talking so much.'

'I am very glad to have heard something about you, and shall hope to know more of you and your little boy; but now, as it is getting late, I will not detain you, especially as I shall have an opportunity of seeing you to-morrow.'

Agnes now bid Miss Grenville good evening, and was soon on her way back to Shoreditch. On reaching Barrett's Court and entering the house she encountered Mrs. Archer, who was somewhat surprised at seeing her coming home at so late an hour. The woman's curiosity was excited to know the cause, and she thought to find it out by saying she hoped that there was nothing amiss.

'No, Mrs. Archer, nothing whatever ; I've only been out on some business which has detained me rather longer than I expected ;' and then she passed on to her room, thinking it best to keep the finding of the locket to herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS GRENVILLE VISITS AGNES WILMOTT AND HER CHILD.

‘Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.’—ST. JAMES i. 27.

THE next, and many successive days, Agnes continued to accompany Mrs. Archer to the lady’s house. The two women had to set out early in the morning to get to their work in good time. The weather was sharp and cold, and very glad they were to get the nice hot coffee the cook gave them the first thing on arriving.

Johnnie went regularly to school. Poor child! he used to dread the time when he had to pass through the court, for the boys would bully him in their rough way. If No. 9 was only at the bottom of the court, Johnnie would say to himself, how much nicer it would have been; then he could have slipped out so much

more easily. This going to and from school was a source of great trouble to the boy, and at first Johnnie was very miserable in Barrett's Court. In the country the neighbours had always been kind to him ; in London they all scowled at him. His happiest times were when he and his mother were together in church, or when they were safely locked in their little room at night.

Johnnie and Nellie became fast friends, for all the time between school-hours, and of an evening until Mrs. Archer and his mother returned home from their work, the two children were together ; Nellie listening with lively interest to all Johnnie would relate about the school, and what he had been learning there. Sometimes he would sing the hymns he knew by heart ; and when he told her they were sung in the church, where he and his mother went so often, Nellie no longer wondered, as she had previously done, that he should like to go there, to listen to the beautiful music and join in the singing.

Hitherto Nellie had had no one to talk to her about these things as Johnnie now did, in his simple, childlike manner. She had often heard the church bells ringing out as each Sunday came round, and had on more than one occasion questioned her mother why she didn't go and see what the great buildings were like inside ; but Mrs. Archer had silenced her by saying that those grand places were not intended for poor folks like themselves, who worked hard from morning till night, from one week's end to another, and needed all the rest they could take on the Sunday. They were for the rich, and those who had good clothes to put on, and hadn't to think of how they were to get their living.

Nellie, seeing that the subject was not an agreeable one to her mother, asked no more questions ; but the child did not think the less in consequence. She knew there was a God, but beyond that everything was obscure and dark.

Nellie had never had an opportunity of seeing the country, although she had

often heard about it from those more fortunate than herself. In the summer-time, whole families turned out of their wretched dwellings in Barrett's Court and hastened into the country to gain employment, in order that they might carry back with them a little stock of money. Most of them would go hop-picking in Kent, for boys and girls, as well as men and women, can do that work; and were it not for such early visits to the country, some of the children would never see a green field or wild flower, or breathe the pure fresh air untainted by London smoke. Nellie had often shed tears when she had heard them talking with interest and looking forward with pleasure to the return of the hop-season. How *she* would have enjoyed the novelty of a ride, such as they sometimes had, in a humble way! A hop-garden is a very pretty sight. The delicate green colour of the hops, as they hang in rich festoons from pole to pole, may well be attractive in the eyes of those who usually gaze on little

else but dirt-begrimed houses and dingy streets, and, indeed, they form one of the greatest ornaments to the landscape in which they are placed. But to the inhabitants of Barrett's Court, and those who joined them from the surrounding alleys, the *money* which they earned by picking them for the farmers was the *best sight of all!*

Nellie confided to her newly found little friend the disappointment she so often experienced in not being able to do as the other children, and in Johnnie she found a willing listener, and one who was always ready to sympathise with her. Unconsciously, too, the little boy was awakening thoughts and desires in the mind of the poor cripple which were to be the means of bringing not only herself, but her mother as well, to a knowledge of Christ and His Holy Church.

Agnes Wilmott worked away in good earnest; she found, however, that it needed all her strength to do what was required, and by the end of the day she was quite done up. The housekeeper

made no remarks, but she plainly saw, as she went in and out of the rooms superintending the work, that Agnes was unequal to it. Mrs. Simpson was a kind-hearted woman, and felt sorry to see her exerting herself as she did.

About ten days had elapsed since Agnes first went to Lady Grenville's house, when one morning, on Mrs. Archer knocking at the attic-door as usual to know if Agnes was ready to start, she found her in bed ill and unable to move. She had strained every nerve to keep on with her work, but in the end her little strength had given way.

‘Well, Mrs. Wilmott,’ she said, ‘I *am* sorry to see you like this; just, too, when you’ve a chance of earning a few shillings—it’s terrible unfortunate! and whatever I shall do to get through all the paint-work as has to be cleaned down by to-morrow, goodness knows! But there! it’s no use my standing talking—as it *is* I’m rather late—so I’ll be off, and hope I may find you better on my return this evening. Mind you keep

Johnnie home from school, for you'll want some one to do for you, and he's a handy little fellow ;' then Mrs. Archer shut-to the door, leaving the sick woman to her own sad reflections.

That same day in the afternoon there was quite a bustle and excitement in the little street where Agnes lived, for a grand carriage drove into it, and inquiries were made by the coachman for Barrett's Court, and *then* for Biddy Mulligan's house. Untidy women came to their doors, and children with unwashed faces and unbrushed heads leaned out of the windows, watching Miss Grenville, as she stepped out of the carriage and walked up to No. 9. It was seldom a lady was seen in that wretched place, and therefore she attracted no little attention. Edith Grenville was accustomed to visiting the poor, and did not shrink from squalor and misery such as existed in the court.

When Biddy Mulligan opened the street-door and saw who her visitor was, she made one of her very lowest courtesies,

asking the lady to walk in ; but in a few minutes, when she found that Miss Grenville had specially called to see Agnes Wilmott, the old woman remarked :

‘ I don’t know, ma’am, however you’ll get up them old stairs : the place ain’t no ways fitting for a lady like you ; but if you’ll wait a minute, I’ll bring a candle and light you a bit.’

Miss Grenville thanked her, accepting the offer, although she was not dismayed at the steep ascent. There was certainly nothing to be afraid of, unless it were the darkness ; for the woodwork, though rather rotten, was sufficiently strong to bear her weight, and the dark serge dress which she carefully gathered around her would not have been any the worse by contact with the stairs, for they were always kept clean.

Agnes was alone when Miss Grenville gently tapped at the door. She was lying in bed supported by a pillow and an old cushion Johnnie had arranged to the best of his abilities before he went out to purchase some tea for his mother.

Her eyes brightened, and her pale face flushed with excitement, when she saw the young lady enter the little room. *This* was, indeed, an unexpected pleasure, and it was some minutes before she quite recovered from her surprise, to express the gratitude she felt for such a favour.

Miss Grenville sat down beside the poor woman, and talked to her kindly and sympathisingly. She was pleased to find so much genuine simplicity of character, and felt convinced, not only from what she had herself observed, but also from the highly commendatory manner in which the priest at Ashington had written about Agnes, in reply to inquiries she had made respecting her, that she was not only honest and truthful, but one who amidst many trials and temptations had striven to keep faithful to her religion. Yes! she believed that this was a case really deserving of help, and made up her mind to try and do something for them which might prove of lasting benefit to Agnes Wilmott and her child.

Whilst Miss Grenville was talking with Agnes a step came tripping up the stairs, and Johnnie entered the room. He stopped short when he saw a strange lady, but she bid him come forward ; and very soon the little fellow forgot his shyness, and was quite at ease.

Miss Grenville was much struck by the intelligence of the child and his ready answers to the questions she asked, showed her very plainly that the boy had natural capabilities which, if cultivated, might in after years be turned to good account. Before, however, suggesting anything to Agnes, she resolved to consult with Father Bernard, who was always ready to advise her in her plans for assisting the poor.

On taking leave of Agnes Miss Grenville promised to call again at the end of a week, bidding her in the meanwhile not to worry herself about her work, for directly she should have recovered her strength sufficiently for employment, there would be something all ready for her to do, adding with a very significant

look, 'and something, if I mistake not, which will keep you busy for a long time. To-day you are not well enough to talk longer ; but when next I see you, I hope you will be stronger, and able to listen to the little plan I have in view.'

And with these cheering words Miss Grenville wished Agnes good-day, leaving her to think over the visit, and what it could possibly be that the lady intended doing for her.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOLY CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

' Weary hearts, with toil oppress'd,
Lo, He comes to give you rest !
Aching hearts, with sorrow worn,
Unto you a Child is born.
Broken hearts, with anguish riven,
Unto you a Son is given !'



AGNES, with rest and the nourishments constantly supplied by her kind benefactress Miss Grenville, soon began to regain her strength.



It seemed, indeed, as if the dark clouds of adversity, which had for so long overshadowed her path through life, were passing away, to be succeeded by brighter and happier days. How often it is that the hour of affliction is never so utterly dark and rayless as just before, the glad sunshine breaks upon its midnight gloom ! God often allows His children to be reduced to the very greatest straits the very hour before relief is afforded.

Bravely and generously had Agnes Wilmott carried the cross of trial and suffering. The Holy Catholic Church had been her guiding star, teaching her what God would have her do, and by the graces received through the Sacraments she had had strength given her to perform the same. She had always remembered that courage without prayer, that resolutions without the assistance of Divine grace, are but poor safeguards in the hour of trial ; and knowing this, she had never neglected her religious duties, so that in the midst of sufferings and want, her soul was full of Christian hope,

and she was able to lift her thoughts above this earth and its miseries, and to say with holy David—‘I fear no evil, for Thou, O God, art with me.’

Some months had passed since Miss Grenville’s first visit to the inmates of No. 9.

Great changes had taken place in that time. Agnes Wilmott was no longer living in the little garret, but was taken into Miss Grenville’s service, and put in charge of the pretty lodge which stood at the entrance of Abingdon Hall, the country residence of Sir Claude and Lady Grenville.

It was a sad day for Biddy Mulligan and her lodgers when Agnes and her little boy bade them farewell. Agnes herself felt both sad and thankful; sad to leave old Biddy in whose welfare she took a lively interest; sad, too, at parting with the little cripple Nellie, who had endeared herself to the widow by her loving ways and patience in suffering.

The change from London to the fresh country air, together with the good plain

food his mother was able to give him, soon had a beneficial effect on Johnnie. In the course of two or three years he was sent by Miss Grenville to the Catholic school at B——, where he made such satisfactory progress in his studies as clearly proved his abilities were of no ordinary kind. His daily conduct, and the good example he set his school-fellows, won for him the esteem of his superiors, who had every reason to believe that Johnnie Wilmott's future would be one to promote God's glory. And so it proved, for in after years the young lad expressed his earnest desire to devote his life to the service of his divine Lord ; and God bestowed on him one of His greatest gifts—a vocation to the religious life—and he had the happiness and privilege of being received as a lay brother in the Franciscan Monastery at M——.

Agnes Wilmott spent the remainder of her life in the service of Lady Grenville. We are glad as we bid her farewell, to leave her so happily circumstanced,

and thankful to God who had raised up such kind friends to help her in the time of need.

We trust that this simple narrative may lead those who read it to resolve that they, like Agnes Wilmott, will ever prize the gift of the true faith, which God in His great mercy has bestowed on them ; and that should it be their lot to suffer here on earth, they will, like her, seek for comfort and strength where she *ever* sought, and *never* sought in vain.

Once again I must ask my readers to return with me to the humble dwelling of Biddy Mulligan.

It was Christmas-tide, the great festival which brings the glad tidings of salvation, the message of love and peace, to the whole Church ; to the rich man in his home of comfort and luxury, and to the poor and indigent in his lowly abode ; to those on whom the world smiles brightly, and to those who in sadness and suffering bear the heat and burden of the day. But to all the children of the Church this holy season

should be one of unfeigned joy and unutterable peace, if only, like the holy men of old, they wait and prepare for the coming of the infant Jesus, and when they have found Him, like them rejoice with exceeding great joy.

To Biddy Mulligan this Christmas morn had been a day of great happiness, for she had been amongst the crowd of worshippers in the Church of St. Monica, and had listened to the wondrous tale of man's redemption, of our Saviour's birth in the lowly manger at Bethlehem which, had brought light and life to a sinful world, peace on earth to men of goodwill. *Above all* had her happiness been complete when she knelt at the Altar, and partook of the Bread of life, the food of angels ; such joy and peace she had not known for many a long year, and earnestly she supplicated God that nothing should henceforth separate her from her divine Lord, but that she might persevere to the end.

Happy old Biddy ! she had passed the allotted threescore and ten years of man's

probation. The light of the other world was opening upon her ; the glorious unchanging beams of love and hope had come with the wonderful tale of peace and glory ; they were shining upon her, and shedding their healing influence on her contrite heart. Perhaps ere the holy feast comes round again, she will have passed away from earth to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of everlasting halls, the palace of the King.

Little Nellie Archer, too, had participated in the joys and blessings of Christmas-tide. The Holy Babe born on this day, Who came to suffer and die that all might be saved, had in His infinite mercy drawn this poor suffering child out of the darkness by which she was surrounded, into the light of the one true Faith. Yes ! Nellie was to receive the grace of Baptism, and to be admitted into the Holy Catholic Church—that great and mighty Mother whose arms of loving charity are ever open to receive alike the poor and simple, as well as the great and learned of this world.

For some weeks past it had become apparent to those who saw the little girl that her strength was rapidly failing, and that the patient suffering would soon be at an end.

Day by day Miss Grenville had visited and done her utmost to prepare the dying child for her Baptism, and what was to follow immediately after. How she had longed for it—and now the happy time had come !

On Christmas Eve she received the Sacrament of Baptism, and on the Feast itself Nellie, with a heart full of joy and gratitude, received her *first* and *last* Communion. That same night Mrs. Archer sat by Nellie's bedside, wiping away the death-drops that stood thickly on her brow. Soon—very soon—the poor mother knew her child would close her eyes in death, and bid farewell to all that was earthly. Poor heart-broken mother ! deep as her sorrow was, she knew it was best as God had willed it ; and as she gazed upon the wasted form of her dying child she bowed her head

in submission to His infinite love and wisdom, Who was taking this His little one (whilst her baptismal robes were fresh and pure) from the evil to come.

Nellie lay for some time very quiet ; now and then a faint murmur escaped her parched lips, as she tried to repeat some short prayer ; and whilst with clasped hands the sweet names of 'Jesus' and 'Mary' were being uttered, a bright and heavenly smile passed across her face, and little Nellie was called away.

The short life was at an end ; the long eternity had begun. Deeply the bereaved mother mourned for her child. Yet when she saw her robed for her last long resting-place, there was such a look of perfect peace on the pale face, which even in death was sweet and beautiful, that she felt she must not wish her darling back again.

Mrs. Archer continued to live in the same little attic. She could not make up her mind to leave the home where

she and Nellie had passed so many years together.

Biddy Mulligan would often sit with Mrs. Archer of an evening, talking of the holy and happy death of the little girl, whose memory ever urged her mother to persevere in the narrow way which leadeth unto life.

THE END.

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